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The Art Gallery

American Art Galleries.

VII.

COLLECTION OF THE ESTATE OF MARSHALL OWEN ROBERTS.



By the recent death of Mr. Roberts at Saratoga Springs, September 11th, 1880, we are deprived of one of our most catholic and enthusiastic art patrons—a collector who bought with genuine enjoyment and appetite, as distinguished from the modern race, who buy from pride and display. He left in his ample gallery at New York a collection of nearly two hundred pictures. A short stroll through the bereaved chambers—necessarily short and parenthetical, and overshadowed with the sense of present loss—will not be ungrateful to us who remember his generous enthusiasm for art with affection and recognizance.

The gem of the gallery is Delaroche's "Napoleon at Fontainebleau," the original of the popular engraving. It is preserved under glass, and though turning black is saved by its clearness of design from important deterioration. The size of this original is about 20 x 30 inches, and its execution is different indeed from that of the wooden life-size figure of the same motive lent as a Delaroche to the Metropolitan Museum and now exposed there. The genuine "Napoleon" is tender and deeply thoughtful—a true figure of tragedy, oppressed with sense of doom and clouds as of a vanishing empire including many kingdoms. "Abdication"—the melancholy of it but not the shame—is written on the ponderous forehead, and the awful lassitude of the sitting posture, with one arm thrown over the chair-back in purposeless enervation, tells the story of one who has given up his sword. With these ideal qualities the picture shows traces of that determined realism which Delaroche was one of the first to insist upon, and which preserves for him a little lingering respect from the bric-à-brac painters. The boots are bemired—real painted studies of boots overpainted with mud—

and therefore respectable to the realists and savory and acceptable to that class of modern dramatists who are ready to kiss any artistic boot that is sufficiently dirty; they show the fatigue of the weary march, the intention of projected flight, the ineffectual stampede. The tight breeches are of the real thick white-cassimere indispensable to the stage Napoleon; the fat hands are the bloodless, puffed hands of Napoleon's decline. These bits of prose Delaroche flings to the realists, relishing them himself sufficiently doubtless, but thinking, before all things, of the poem, the idea, the epos.

picture assists us to pass once more between the wicked extinguisher towers of the Conciergerie and inhabit that small, close room, with weeping walls, where an Austrian princess withered away. The queen, her family left behind in the Temple, is alone with her tormentors. Standing to meet the deputation from the Convention, she rises in her tragic rags of mourning, the threadbare fichu pinned upon her breast, her thin hand hanging upon the back of a rush chair. At her right the prison gendarme, insolently covered and sitting in the presence of royalty and womanhood, retains his cocked-hat, and lolls upon the table; at her left, Fabricius, the Recorder of the Convention, reads to her the sentence, while Hermann, its Vice-President, and Coffenhall and Collier, its commissioners for the present business, attend and combine their forces against the victim, as if a company of plebeians were required to form a match to the individual prestige of the throne. Such pictures, painted on the spot, and realized in accessories and details with the modern scientific spirit, though they may be reproached with *Porte-Saint-Martin*, form historic pages that even Carlyle could not despise.

Church's "Rainy Season in the Tropics," painted in 1866, is not one of his largest pictures, but must be one of the more important in the artist's view, since he selected it for the Paris Exposition of 1867. It is a green romance of scenery, draped in a falling gauze of rain, and clasped with a rainbow. Said an ill-tempered French critic (H. de la Madelène, a pseudonym perhaps of some pessimist, in the *Paris Guide*), "The United States of America are assuredly a grand country, and the North-Americans a grand people, but what small artists they are! These great daubs they display, under pretexts of 'Niagaras' or 'Rainy Seasons in the Tropics'" [yes, the specification was there, worse luck for Mr. Roberts's picture!] "at-

test as much childish arrogance as puerile ignorance. It is affirmed that these discordant broadsides sell for insane prices at Philadelphia and Boston. I am willing to believe it, but I could not congratulate myself upon it." Having quoted so disobliging a notice, I am bound to cite one of another complexion. Gérôme, who had then just made Mr. Church's acquaintance in the East, and seen the contributions of his fellow-traveller to the Champ de Mars, said encouragingly, apropos of this picture, to



ORIGINAL SKETCH BY SARAH BERNHARDT.

SCENE FROM "L'ÉTRANGÈRE." (SEE PAGE 90.)

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Take it all in all, the picture is a noble attitude without a bit of posing, and only seeming stogy to us because the whole visible conception of Napoleon is now a victim relegated to the stage; a worthy precursor of Vela's fine statue of "Gli Ultimi Giorni."

"Reading the Death Warrant to Marie Antoinette" is a populous group by Muller, of Paris, whose "Roll-Call of Victims of the Terror" is preserved at the Luxembourg and also in Mr. Astor's collection. This

the writer, "Je viens de rencontrer votre Monsieur Church; ça commence, chez vous là-bas, ça commence!" A kindly glance of his piercing eyes gave point to this otherwise vague commendation.

The vast canvas of Mr. Leutze, "Washington Crossing the Delaware," forms one of the most conspicuous objects in the collection. It is a roomful in itself, a life-size life-boat being filled with life-size heroes, and enormous blocks of ice, seemingly measured from those symmetrical ones daily delivered by the modern ice-cart, crushing the very foundations of the building from one wall to another. This gigantic affair was painted at Düsseldorf in 1851, and no doubt seemed at the time quite as good as the vast decorations of Lessing. In the bows of the boat Washington, unmuffling himself to strike a statuesque attitude in the cold, seems like some Bowery actor in a moment of exaltation, while the officers behind are respectfully cowed, discouraged, and cloaked, not presuming to compete with their chief either in fortitude or quantity of influenza, and the boatmen picturesquely get their legs over the gunnels to kick away the ice. No sensible man, with a notion of boat-building and navigation, ever stood in a boat as this Washington does; and the "pater patriæ" was sensible, and a man, and an expert in boating and rafting. The picture, in fact, is a Düsseldorf tableau, ambitious and fine, creditable for 1851 perhaps, but utterly unable to hold its own, historically, æsthetically, or artistically, in the severer taste of the present day. It is the kind of thing one wishes to present to a lyceum hall in the country. But it remains in the plain, green-carpeted gallery, after delighting the eyes of many honest guests and visitors, a monument of its late owner's beneficence toward a favorite artist, and a historical document illustrating our American taste in paintings, if not our American history.

"The Triumph of the Cross," also by Leutze, is a composition of hundreds of figures, where an allegorical sequence of types and events is treated as if it were some holy-week procession in Rome or Naples, which Leutze had watched when he was in Europe—processions of good Catholic fervor and intolerance, when an encouraging feeling of sanctity is felt in the breasts of participants, and it behooves any inconvenient holders of more ancient Oriental faiths to get away with their best dispatch.

"The Arch of Titus" is a curious memorandum by Mr. Healy. It commemorates a reunion of American notables in the Eternal City. Longfellow and his golden-haired daughter are passing beneath the hoary arch of triumph; Church is seated sketching it, with Healy and McEntee looking over his shoulder. The picture is large; in quality not surprising.

"The Smoker" is a fine little Meissonier. A man-

at-arms is represented sitting, his curly black head and olive complexion relieved against the panels, his leather buff-coat creasing to his regular breathing, as he holds a long clay pipe to his lips. On the bench are his sword, hat, and gloves. As for the merit of this picture, I need only repeat my conviction several times expressed; when you get a Meissonier interior of this period you are certain to get a good thing; when you get a Meissonier open-air scene of any period, it is a hit or miss whether you get a picture much better than an Escosura, with the chances against you.

"The Egyptian Conscripts" is in quality the best

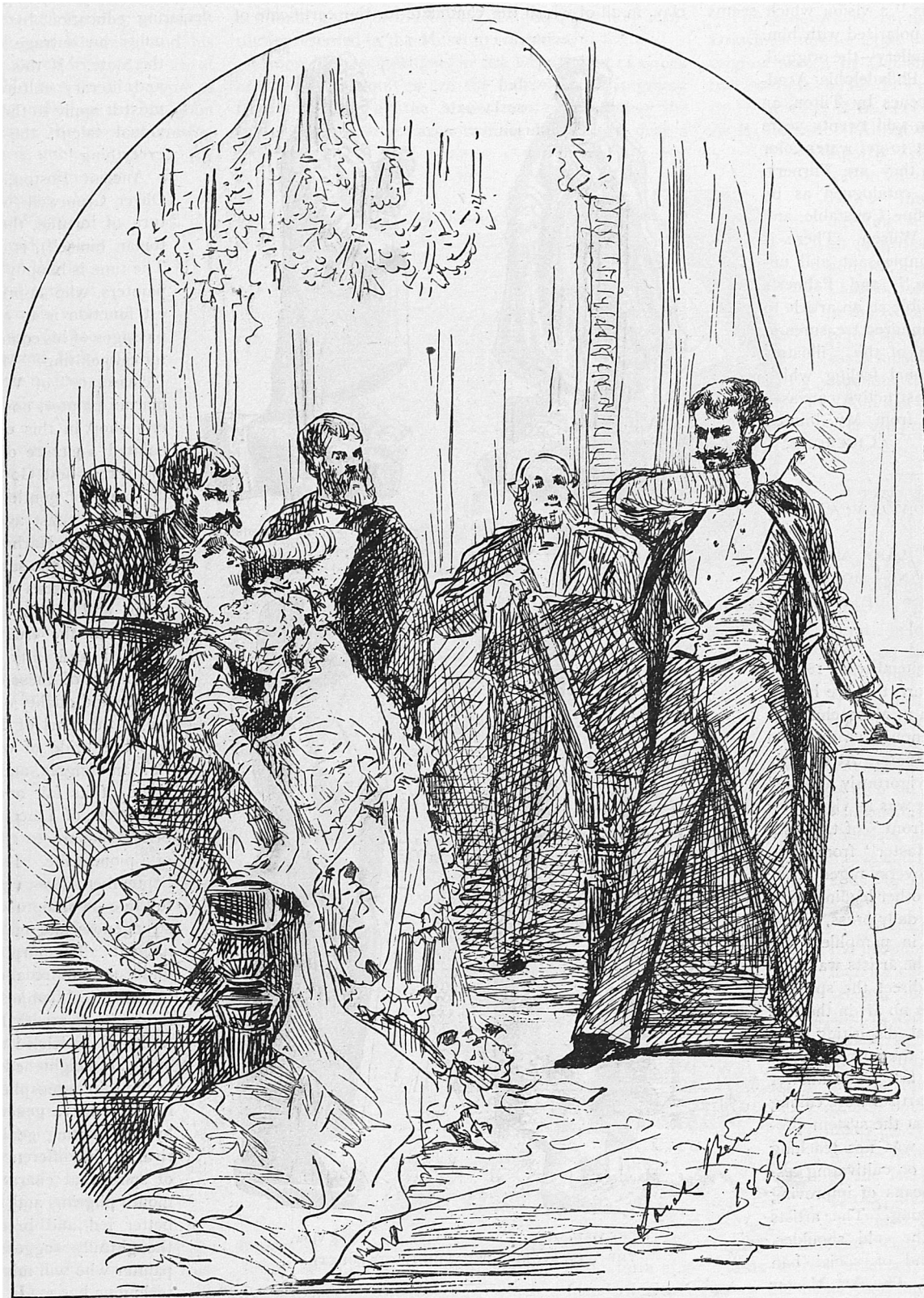
with a hecatomb at any hint of desertion. This is the only known Gérôme with thoroughly satisfactory air quality. It is admired by the most exacting landscape artists for the virtues proper to their line of art. It was one of the first canvases of the artist brought to this country, having been painted in 1857. I recollect the offer of it for eleven hundred dollars, a tenth of its present value, by its owner, Mr. Harrison Earle; he had become disgusted with it because of a slight hole punched in the upper portion, now repaired.

"New Year's Day in New Amsterdam" is a large, ambitious work by G. W. Boughton. There are twenty-five prominent figures, in a scene white with snow, out of which emerge the beautiful staircased gables of the old Dutch architecture. The buxom lasses of the colony are gathering in that galaxy of rosiness which ensued on the happy day when they were "the most bekissed community in Christendom." "The great assemblage," says Knickerbocker, "was at the Governor's house, whither repaired all the burghers of New Amsterdam, with their wives and daughters, pranked out in their best attire. On this occasion the good Peter was devoutly observant of the pious Dutch rite of kissing the womankind for a happy New Year, and it is traditional that Anthony the trumpeter, who acted as gentleman usher, took toll of all that were young and handsome."

Mr. Boughton is also represented by "Summer," a girl in the costume of Cowper's time, and "Winter," a corresponding figure.

The good old-fashioned historical pictures, milestones of a vanished track of taste, are here abundantly. When will Americans resume the painting of their history, or encourage foreigners again to do it for them? "The Landing of the Pilgrims" is by W. H. Powell, painted in 1853. "The Embarkation of the Pilgrims" is by R. W. Weir. An illustration from Irving's "Alhambra" is by Pollak. Other historical scenes are less national. "Marie de Medicis in Rubens' Studio," by Schaeffels, of Antwerp, is in the style of Carl Becker and Carl Hoff. "Queen Elizabeth and Leicester" is by Pinelli. "Michael

Angelo and Vittoria Colonna" is by Van Oerp. You can see these pictures pretty well from here. "Cromwell at the Church of St. Mary Ossory," defying the agents, the prelates, and the worshippers of the scarlet woman with an energy that you may well believe in, is by a great neglected American colorist, Rothermel. "The Fall of Cardinal Wolsey" is by Laslet John Pott, an interesting and rising artist, born in Nottinghamshire in 1837, celebrated for his "Effie Deans" and "Charles II. Coming from Trial." In the present composition there are ten figures; the king, frowning, walks haughtily from the throne, fol-



ORIGINAL SKETCH BY SARA BERNHARDT.

SCENE FROM "CAMILLE." (SEE PAGE 90.)

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Gérôme I know of. Its sense of landscape, of air, of breathable dust and vibrating light, is overpowering. You seem to see the currents of heat quivering up from these restless sands, where the plunging feet of multitudes have sunk pits and traps like the dens of antilions. Over the waste of misery go the drafted soldiers in their village dresses and village nakedness, fellahs chained to negroes, youths fastened to old men, wrist to wrist, in wooden handcuffs similar to the old-fashioned stocks for the feet. The grim Arnaut captains advance at the head, suspicious, alert, and heartless, finger on trigger, ready to gratify the buzzards

lowed by a surly mastiff, who seems his familiar and reflection; a half dozen of courtiers, like Clyties after the sun, attend him obediently, going away from the disgraced prince of the church the moment he is no longer powerful; the cardinal bows profoundly, grasping a chair for support, and clutching the fatal parchment.

In the collection we may see the instructive high-water-marks of taste. There are a great many Huntingtons, and Louis Langs, and Rossiters, and Cropseys, and Henry Peters Grays. Each acquisition was the record of a friendship, a generous and loyal hand-clasp, a frank, independent meeting of two pairs of eyes; the purchase was not felt to be patronage by the buyer nor condescension by the seller. Here Huntington dropped one of his "Mercy's Dreams," a vision which seems to have become chronically polarized with him. Another is in the Corcoran Gallery—the original, and by far the best, in the Philadelphia Academy. Here are Egyptian scenes by Tilton, an American Turner, everybody said twenty years ago; and indeed, in the effort to get water-color effects out of oil painting, they are Turners. There is a small landscape catalogued as by Turner himself. There is a fine Constable, and an earlier and interesting Wilson. There is Story's acidulous, meagre, unpleasant, and unlearned statue of "Salome," and Palmer's "Sappho." But it is impossible in an article to give an "aperçu" of two hundred treasures of art. The liberality, the love of the "illustration-picture," the proud national feeling, which prompted this amassing of instructive canvases will perhaps faintly emerge from my limited description. CICERONE.

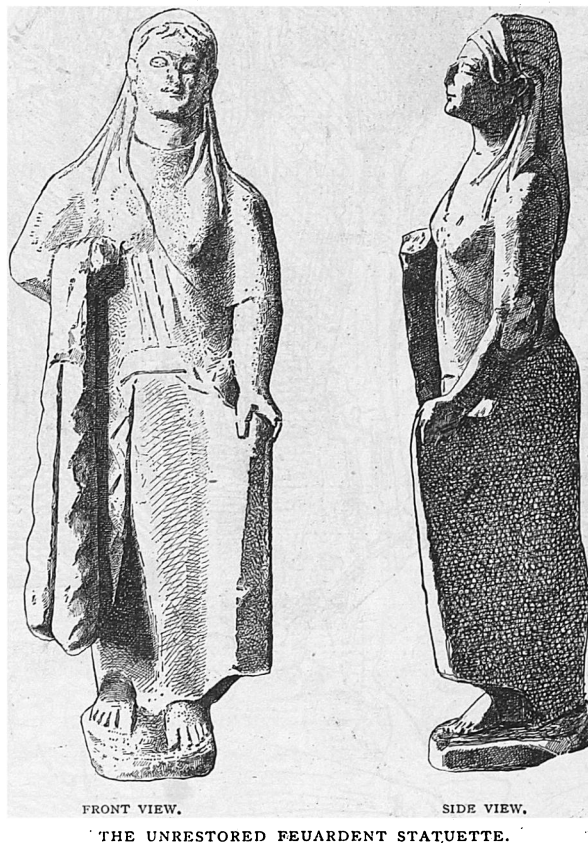
BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

CONCERNING AN ENGLISH "ART MASTER"—AN HISTORICAL PAINTING—MONEY VS. BLOOD—PARISIAN SUCCESS OF ANOTHER BOSTON ARTIST—NOTES.

BOSTON, September 18, 1880.

PERHAPS you were not aware that we have a State system of art-instruction in Massachusetts. Not that there has not been enough writing and fighting about it in the newspapers. At an early period of its existence it was vigorously attacked by the artists, and the defence was as vigorously conducted by the "head and front" of the institution, the imported "Art Master" from Kensington, England. The controversy raged in the columns of *The Nation* and other leading New York journals, in the Boston daily press, and in the educational newspapers, in pamphlets and reports. The contention of the artists was that no artists were employed to direct the spirit of the instruction; that there was no art in the true sense about it, only mechanical, dispiriting labor and copying by rule; and that the outcome must be valueless for the cause of art. The answer returned was that the art the artists were calling for was not the kind of art that the system proposed to itself; that the State was not teaching art as a means of gratifying or cultivating æsthetic sensibilities, but as a means of improving manufactures and money-making. The artists finally gave the institution the cold shoulder, and managed to leave a kind of social ban upon its teachers and pupils. The Art Master and his backers among the education authorities in State and city returned contempt for contempt. The former, who had brought with him from England something of the overbearing style of the iron-master, remarked that the object of his system was to help men earn their living in producing something useful, not to lead them on to starve in painting pretty clouds and scenery. The artists having disapproved of an Art Master as a State institution, the Art Master disapproved of artists as members of the community of artisans which he had decided to turn Massachusetts into, and which he had contracted to produce from the public schools. The support of a certain excellent gentleman in this city, accepted by his colleagues on the school committee as an authority on art, who was committed by reason of his having brought over the Art Master, and of a number of Gradgrinds whose only idea of art is that she

should be a handmaid in a calico-print works or carpet manufactory, has availed to keep the State art instruction in funds sufficient for a good salary to the Art Master at least. An elaborate and extensive series of drawing patterns and books has been published (not without profit to the publishers, of course), the entire body of scholars in the public schools has been set to work copying simultaneously, at appointed weeks of the year, and according to class and grade, certain graded drawing patterns, and a normal school to supply teachers for the system, with an imposing curriculum—extending over several years and embracing everything from mechanical, mathematical, architectural, and engineering drafting to oil-painting and modelling in clay, in all of which the candidate for the certificate of



THE FEUARDENT-CESNOLA CONTROVERSY ILLUSTRATED.
FOR EXPLANATION SEE PAGE 90.

teacher is required to become proficient, or else drop out and become a "mere artist"—has been established. This normal school, after having been located in the top of a mercantile building for several years, has just been removed to a large brick mansion known as the "Deacon House," a long-disused "folly" built by an ambitious rich man, and decorated like a château, but in an entirely improper location for a fashionable residence. This is somewhat of a "looking-up" for the Normal Art School and the Art Master, but it is not precisely the Back Bay rival to the Art Museum that the Legislature last winter granted a lot of public land for, on condition that a specified ample sum of money should be raised for a building upon it. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The Normal Art School, and the

Industrial Art instruction, and its doughty British Art Master, have held on their way sturdily through years of opposition, active and passive, and bid fair to continue to do so. They ought to begin to show some fruits presently. Nothing would more effectually silence the carping that has attended them. Can they do it? The French commissioners at the Centennial Exhibition recorded their generous admiration for the organized system of wholesale instruction as a feat of organization and an adjunct of manufacturing industry. But they did not describe it or acknowledge it as art-instruction. The recent report in the American Association for the Advancement of Science denounced the public-school system in general as false and delusive, declaring education by wholesale, ignoring individuality, an outrage on the pupils and a fraud on the State. If this be true as regards scientific and literary culture, how much more forcibly must it apply to the study of art, where the individual talent, the individual temperament, is everything!

Ancient Boston, the Boston of the days of Oliver Cromwell (who just missed, by a trifling turn of fortune, the honor of becoming a Bostonian himself), is having a "boom" this week. The time is happily selected by one of our young painters, who appreciates that the artist's highest function is to embalm the heroes and heroic passages of his country's history, to exhibit a historical painting. Mr. W. F. Halsall, who was a "classmate" of W. E. Norton, the successful marine painter, now of London, in a sign-painter's shop in this city a dozen years ago, has painted a picture of the fleet that brought John Winthrop, first Governor of Massachusetts, and his party of gentlefolks, from old St. Botolph's town, as it cast anchor in what thereupon became Boston Harbor. The wooded islands and shore convey the savagery of the land when these primitive citizens arrived, and the picturesque poops and prows of the ancient ships take us back into the true historical romance of two hundred and fifty years ago. The size and equipment of these quaint old ships speak of the wealth and quality of the voyagers. The daughter of the Earl of Lincoln, the Lady Arabella, was the bride of one of the wealthiest of the Puritan émigrés, and one of the ships bore the name of its fair and gentle passenger. Alas! this "rose of Lincoln" sickened and died after a brief exposure to the hardships and privations of a pioneer life. The ships lie bathed in a warm September sunset upon the smooth and shining full tide—a sumptuous group in their Old World strangeness and cumbrousness of build and ornament. The purpose of the artist is more fully understood on recalling his treatment of a similar historical subject—the arrival of the Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor. There the pathetic frailty of the icicled vessel and meagreness of its outfit are heightened by the steely, wintry gleam of the thin atmosphere and ice-strewn water, as here the more generous comfort is emphasized by the favoring genial circumstances of the arrival. The difference between the acrid severity of spirit that characterized the melancholy Plymouth pilgrims and the less ascetic tone of the better fed and bred Boston Puritans is thus thoughtfully suggested. Halsall is evidently a painter who will mix brains with his paint. His technique has made rapid advance since his first appearance a few years back.

The story of a Stuart portrait sent hither the other day from New York for sale is worth telling, as illustrative of the stratifications in Boston art and society. A prominent representative of the "nouveau riche" whom I will call Devere, deeming it necessary to number a Stuart among his art investments, had given an unlimited order to his dealer to buy him one. This Stuart arriving from New York, happened to be the portrait of a departed worthy named Devere. Gleefully the dealer hastened with the information to his patron Devere. But there are Deveres and Deveres, and if there is anything the Deveres of one sort hate it is the Deveres of the other sort. I would not undertake to say whether the Deveres of blood disdain the Deveres of money more than the Deveres of money detest the Deveres of blood. What happened was that the moneyed Devere averred that he wouldn't have the stuck-up lineaments